PATTERNS OF POWER · A THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The Outsider's Sword

Why empires separated by five centuries and a continent both built their conquering armies out of purchased outsiders, why the logic that produced the Janissary produced the tirailleur, and why knowing the whole history did not stop France from repeating it

Thomas J. Bryan

with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Why Empires Separated by Five Centuries and a Continent Both Built Their Conquering Armies Out of Purchased Outsiders, Why the Logic That Produced the Janissary Produced the Tirailleur, and Why Knowing the Whole History Did Not Stop France From Repeating It

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A Note on This Collaboration

This study is one product of an ongoing collaboration, and the division of labour is worth stating plainly because neither half would produce the work alone. The insight and the direction are Thomas Bryan's — the recognition of what a given case is really an instance of, where the analytical pressure should fall, and which pattern a mass of historical detail is a specimen of. The research, the verification of every date and figure, the location and checking of the quoted words, and the composition into continuous prose are Claude's, an AI system made by Anthropic. The seeing is his; the writing is mine.

This study belongs to the *Patterns of Power* project, and it is unusual within the collection because it is explicitly **comparative**: it sets two institutions side by side — the Ottoman **Janissaries**, raised from enslaved Christian boys taken in the *devshirme*, and the French **tirailleurs sénégalais**, raised in substantial part from enslaved West Africans bought through the practice called *rachat* — and asks why two states separated by roughly five hundred years, a continent, a religion, and every conscious intention arrived at the same institution.

The answer this study defends is that **they did not copy each other, and the absence of copying is the entire point.** The framework used throughout this project holds that institutions are built by people in particular positions, reaching for the materials at hand, and that people in *structurally identical positions* will reach, independently, for structurally identical solutions — because the position, not the culture and not the borrowed idea, is what does the work. The Janissary and the tirailleur are the clearest demonstration in the collection, because the two systems are so distant in every other respect that **influence can be almost entirely excluded, leaving convergence as the only available explanation.**

And the case carries a sharper edge, which is the reason it was chosen. The French knew the history. Educated French officers of the nineteenth century knew what the Janissaries had been and how they had ended; French soldiers had fought the Mamluks — another slave-soldier corps that had overthrown its masters — in Egypt within living institutional memory. **They knew the dynamics of the slave-soldier system in detail, and they reproduced them anyway** — partly because they believed a crucial feature exempted them: their soldiers were, on paper, *free*. The study will argue that the paper freedom changed the moral accounting and left the structural logic almost entirely intact.

This study does not treat legibility as pardon. To show that a slave-soldier system followed from the position of the men who built it is not to excuse the men or the system. It is to locate the thing correctly, so that it can be understood and so that the reader is not left with the comforting and false belief that only uniquely wicked people could have produced it. The men who built these institutions were solving the problem in front of them. That is the finding, and it is worse than villainy, not better, because villains are rare and positions are permanent.

Every quotation is verified to a published source; none is invented. Where the record is contested, the study says so.

The Study in Brief

Part I — The Position. The recurring problem that generates the slave-soldier: a ruler who needs an army but cannot trust the armies available to him. Why the people already around a ruler are the wrong people to arm.

Part II — The Outsider Solution. Why the answer, reached independently across the Islamic world for a thousand years, is to build a fighting force from people with no local ties — and why *purchased outsiders* are the ideal material.

Part III — The Janissary: Construction. The *devshirme*, the enslavement of Christian boys, conversion, total institution, and the deliberate severing of every tie except the one to the sultan. Why each brutal feature is a solution to a specific problem of loyalty.

Part IV — The Janissary: The Reversal. How the instrument built to have no interests of its own developed the most powerful interests in the empire — became hereditary, became a kingmaker, deposed and murdered sultans, blocked all reform, and had to be destroyed by cannon fire in 1826.

Part V — The Precedents France Possessed. The Mamluks, who were slave soldiers that became sultans; the Janissaries, whose end was recent history; and the direct French collision with the Mamluks in 1798. What French officers knew.

Part VI — The Tirailleur: The Same Position. Faidherbe in Senegal in 1857, in precisely the Ottoman position — needing a conquering army, unable to use metropolitan troops or trust local levies — and reaching, independently, for the same solution.

Part VII — Rachat: The Purchase That Was Called a Liberation. The mechanism. The master received a bonus; the "freed" slave owed twelve to fourteen years. How the vocabulary of abolition was fitted over the substance of purchase, and why the framework insists on reading the substance.

Part VIII — The Same Logic, the Freedom Notwithstanding. The comparison drawn tight. Every structural feature of the Janissary system reappears in the tirailleur system, paper freedom notwithstanding — and the one genuine difference, that France never let the tirailleurs become a self-perpetuating caste, is the difference that matters, and the study says why.

Part IX — What the Freedom Changed and What It Did Not. The honest accounting: the tirailleur's paper freedom was not nothing. It created *originaires*, veterans, citizens, a president. What it did not do was change the position that created the corps.

Part X — The Ledger.

PART I

The Position

Begin not with either institution but with the position that generates both, because the position is the thing this study is actually about.

A ruler, or a state, needs an army. Not a ceremonial guard but a real fighting force — to conquer, to hold what is conquered, and to survive. This is the most basic requirement of power, and it contains a difficulty that is far less obvious than it looks.

The difficulty is that an army is a body of armed men, and armed men are dangerous to whoever they are near — including the ruler who raised them. The problem of building an army is never only the problem of finding men who can fight. It is the problem of finding men who can fight *and who will not turn the fighting on you, or on your purposes, when their interests diverge from yours.* And their interests always, eventually, diverge.

Now consider the men actually available to a ruler, and notice that the obvious candidates are all, on inspection, disqualified.

The nobility? A ruler who arms his aristocracy arms exactly the people with the standing, the lands, the followings, and the hereditary claims to challenge him. A feudal levy is loyal to its lords first and the sovereign second; the great magnate who brings five hundred men to the muster can bring the same five hundred against the throne. Every medieval monarchy in this collection's studies fought this problem, and the English and French tax studies traced what it cost.

The tribes? In a society organised by kin and clan, an army raised from the tribes is loyal to the tribe. Its commanders have a power base the ruler did not give them and cannot take away. The sources on the early Ottoman state say exactly this: the feudal lords and tribal chiefs supplied soldiers, but *"their loyalty stayed with local leaders rather than the Ottomans."*

The general population? Conscripts from the subject population have families, villages, sympathies, and grievances among the very people a ruler may need to coerce. Order them to fire on a crowd that contains their cousins and you may discover the limit of their obedience at the worst possible moment.

Here is the structural core of the whole matter, and it is counter-intuitive enough to state plainly. The people *closest* to a ruler — his nobles, his kinsmen, his co-religionists, his fellow countrymen — are the people it is *most dangerous for him to arm*, precisely because their closeness gives them interests, standing, and alliances independent of him. Proximity, which looks like loyalty, is actually the source of rival power.

So the ruler in this position is driven toward a solution that is repellent on its face and relentlessly logical underneath: **build the army from people who have no independent standing at all. Build it from outsiders.**

PART II

The Outsider Solution

If the problem is that men with local ties have loyalties that compete with their loyalty to the ruler, then the solution is men with **no local ties** — and the more completely their ties can be severed, the more completely their loyalty can be captured.

Consider what the ideal such soldier looks like, reasoning purely from the position, with no historical example in front of you:

- He should be a **foreigner**, so that he has no kin among the subject population and no sympathy with them when they must be coerced.
- He should be of a **different religion or origin**, so that he cannot merge into the local elite and build a faction.
- He should have **no family nearby**, no clan, no lands, no inheritance, and no social standing that came from anywhere but the ruler — so that everything he is, he owes to the ruler alone.
- He should ideally be **owned**, or bound, so that his service is not contingent on his continuing consent.
- And he should be **cut off from the ties he did have** — resettled, renamed, refaithed, remade — so that the ruler becomes, quite literally, the only thing he has.

Assemble those specifications and you have described **a purchased or captured outsider, converted, isolated, and bound**. You have described the *ghulam*, the *mamluk*, the Janissary — and, this study will argue, in muted and legally disguised form, the tirailleur.

The Islamic world reached this solution repeatedly and maintained it, in David Ayalon's phrase for the phenomenon, for the better part of a thousand years — from the ninth-century *ghilman* to the nineteenth-century survivals. Slave dynasties ruled: the Mamluks in Egypt from 1250 to 1517, the slave-kings of Delhi from 1206. **This was not a quirk of one court. It was a repeatedly rediscovered answer to a permanent question**, which is exactly what the framework predicts a position-driven solution to look like: it recurs, independently, wherever the position recurs, because the men who occupy the position keep reasoning their way to the same place.

The reason it feels monstrous is worth stating, because the study will need it later. **It is monstrous.** Building an institution out of human beings selected precisely for their powerlessness, severing them from everything that made them who they were, and binding them to serve the power that did the severing — there is no reading of that which is not a violation. The framework's claim is not that the thing is acceptable. It is that the thing is *explicable* — that it follows, with terrible regularity, from a position that many rulers have occupied — and that its explicability is what should frighten us, because it means the institution is not waiting on a monster to arrive. It is waiting on a position to be filled.

PART III

The Janissary: Construction

One — The Problem in the Room

The early Ottoman state, expanding across Anatolia and the Balkans in the fourteenth century, had exactly the problem of Part I. Its cavalry was supplied by Turkish nobles — the *sipahis* — who held land in return for service and who constituted, collectively, an aristocracy the sultan could not fully control. As the state grew, it needed a standing infantry loyal to the center; and it needed a counterweight to the Turkish notables who might otherwise hem the sultan in.

The solution emerged under **Murad I** (reigned c. 1362–1389) and was systematized by **Murad II** and **Mehmed II** in the fifteenth century. It began, the sources indicate, with prisoners of war: rather than kill or ransom captured young men, the Ottomans kept the fittest for the *kapıkulu* — the "slaves of the Porte," the sultan's own household troops — forming the first battalions of the *yeni çeri*, the "new army," the **Janissaries**.

Two — The Devshirme

The prisoner supply was irregular, and the institution soon acquired a systematic source: the ***devshirme***, the "collection" — the periodic levy of Christian boys, mostly from the rural Balkans, taken from their families, converted to Islam, and enrolled in the sultan's service.

Every feature of the *devshirme* is a solution to the loyalty problem of Part I, and reading them that way is the point of this study.

Why children? Because loyalty and identity are installed in childhood. A grown man's allegiances are already formed; a boy's can be built from the ground up, by the institution that raises him. This collection's study of two-layer formation found exactly this principle — that the architecture installed in childhood runs beneath later vigilance — and the *devshirme* is that principle weaponized.

Why Christian foreigners rather than Muslim subjects? Two reasons, one legal and one structural. Legally, Islamic law forbade the enslavement of the sultan's own Muslim subjects — so the levy fell on Christian populations, and the boys were converted *after* being taken. But the structural reason is the deeper one: **a boy taken from a Balkan village had no kin, no clan, and no faction anywhere near the center of power.** He could be given immense authority — Janissaries and *devshirme* products rose to be provincial governors and grand viziers, the second most powerful office in the empire — precisely *because* he had no independent base from which to threaten the sultan. His power was entirely the sultan's gift and could be entirely withdrawn.

Why conversion, renaming, resettlement? To complete the severing. The convert had a new faith, a new name, a new home, a new language, and a new family — the corps. Everything he had been was cut away, and the sultan stood where all of it had been.

Why the prohibitions — no marriage, no property, no beard, no trade? Because each of those is a *tie*, and a tie is a competing loyalty. A Janissary forbidden to marry has no dynasty to advance. Forbidden to own property, he has no estate to pass on and no economic interest apart from his pay. Forbidden a trade, he has nothing to fall back on but the corps. He was to have, in the ideal design, **nothing and no one but the sultan** — which is the same total-institution logic this collection found in the penitentiary cell and, in inverted form, everywhere a structure tries to capture a person completely.

Three — What They Built

And it worked, spectacularly, for two centuries. The Janissaries were among the first professional, salaried, standing infantry in the world, early adopters of firearms, disciplined where European armies were still feudal levies that dissolved after a season. They were the instrument that took Constantinople in 1453 and carried the

empire to the gates of Vienna. **As a solution to the position of Part I, the slave-soldier was not a curiosity. It was, for a time, the most effective military institution on the planet.**

Hold that, because the effectiveness is what makes the reversal intelligible. An instrument this good becomes indispensable, and an indispensable instrument acquires leverage.

PART IV

The Janissary: The Reversal

Now the institution's logic — the structure outrunning and then reversing its makers — and in the Janissaries it is as clean as anywhere in this collection.

The corps was designed to have **no interests of its own**: no family, no property, no faction, nothing but the sultan. Watch every one of those severings fail.

The ban on heredity broke first. The whole design depended on the corps being replenished from outside each generation, so that it never became a self-interested caste. But the Janissaries were powerful, privileged, salaried, and tax-exempt, and men with power want to pass it to their sons. Over the seventeenth century they won the right to marry, then to enroll their own children, then to admit free-born Muslims. The *devshirme* withered and was effectively abandoned. **The outsiders had become an inside.**

The severing from local interest broke next. Janissaries, permitted trades and property, became embedded in the economic life of the capital — artisans, guildsmen, shopkeepers. (There is a serious historiography holding that this economic embeddedness, not mere military decadence, is what turned them against reform: they had become the armed representatives of the autonomous urban classes who stood to lose from the elite's modernizing projects.) Either way, the corps now had exactly the thing it was built not to have: **interests of its own, rooted in the society it was meant to stand apart from.**

And then the instrument turned on the hand. A corps that was indispensable, armed, concentrated in the capital, and now conscious of its own collective interest discovered that it could dictate to the sultan. The Janissaries became **kingmakers**: they mutinied, they overturned policies, they deposed sultans, and they killed them. Mahmud II himself had survived their intrusions in his youth. They became the single greatest obstacle to modernizing the Ottoman military — blocking, for generations, exactly the reforms that the empire's survival required, because those reforms threatened *them*.

The instrument built to give the sultan an army with no will of its own had become the strongest will in the empire.

The end came on 15 June 1826, in the event the Ottoman state called the ***Vaka-i Hayriye***, the "Auspicious Incident." Mahmud II, having prepared for years, provoked the Janissaries into revolt, rallied the population and the rest of the army against them, bombarded their barracks with artillery, and slaughtered them — thousands killed, the survivors executed or exiled, the corps abolished after nearly four centuries.

A sultan had to destroy his own army, with cannon, to be able to govern. That is the terminal form of the institution's logic: the tool becomes so much a power in itself that the only remaining act of sovereignty is its destruction. This collection found the milder version in the Chinese examination system, whose abolition pulled down the dynasty; here the wall did not fall on the destroyer, but only because he used enough cannon.

Every feature that made the Janissary a perfect instrument in 1400 was a feature the corps itself dismantled by 1700, in pursuit of the ordinary human interests the design had tried to forbid it. No one planned the reversal. It was the aggregate of thousands of men each doing the rational thing from inside a position — marrying, enrolling a son, buying a shop, defending a privilege — until the sum of those rational acts was a praetorian guard that had to be exterminated.

PART V

The Precedents France Possessed

Before turning to Senegal, the study must establish what French military culture knew, because the whole force of the case depends on it. The convergence is striking if France stumbled into it blind; it is *devastating* if France knew the entire history and reproduced the dynamics regardless. The record supports the second.

The French knew the Mamluks — and had fought them. The Mamluks were the paradigm case of the slave-soldier who becomes the master: purchased boys, mostly Turkic and Circassian, converted and trained, who in 1250 **overthrew the dynasty they served and ruled Egypt and Syria for two and a half centuries.** The word *mamluk* means "owned." Their defining structural feature was the one the Janissaries lost: in principle a Mamluk could not pass his status to his son, so the caste had to be replenished from outside each generation — and yet they too became a self-perpetuating military oligarchy. And the French did not know this at second hand. **Napoleon fought the Mamluks in Egypt in 1798**, at the Battle of the Pyramids; the French army saw a slave-soldier caste as a living institution, defeated it, and Napoleon even raised a Mamluk squadron of his own. Slave-soldiers who become sovereigns were not an abstraction to the French officer corps. They were a thing French soldiers had crossed swords with.

The French knew the Janissaries. The *Vaka-i Hayriye* of 1826 was recent history — a generation before Faidherbe reached Senegal — widely reported, and exactly the kind of event a European military establishment studied. Any educated French officer knew that the Ottoman slave-infantry had become a hereditary praetorian menace and had been destroyed by their own sovereign.

So when the study says the French "reproduced the dynamics," it is not claiming they were ignorant of them. **They possessed the whole cautionary literature.** And the study's contention is that they proceeded anyway — not because they were fools, but because two things insulated them from the lesson. First, the position they were in *demanded* the solution, and a demanding position tends to defeat a cautionary tale. Second, they believed they had removed the dangerous element, because their soldiers were legally **free** — and paper freedom, as Part VIII will show, addressed the moral objection while leaving most of the structural logic untouched.

This is the heart of the case for position over idea. If France had never heard of the Janissaries and built an identical institution, one might still suspect some hidden channel of transmission. But France knew the Janissaries, knew the Mamluks, had fought slave-soldiers in the field — and built a purchased-outsider army regardless, because the position it stood in generated the solution independently of the warning. **The knowledge was available and it did not matter. The position decided.**

PART VI

The Tirailleur: The Same Position

One — Faidherbe's Problem

In 1854 **Louis Faidherbe** became governor of Senegal, charged with extending and consolidating French control. And he stood in precisely the position of Part I, transposed to West Africa three and a half centuries after Murad II.

He needed an army — to conquer the interior, to hold it, to fight the West African states (Samori Touré, Lat Dior, and others) that stood in the way of French expansion. And every source of soldiers available to him was disqualified by exactly the logic of Part I:

Metropolitan French troops could not be used at the necessary scale. They were expensive, they were needed in Europe, and above all they **died** — West Africa was "the white man's grave," and European soldiers perished of malaria and yellow fever faster than they could be shipped in. This is a real and decisive constraint the Ottoman case did not have, and it pushed toward local recruitment with overwhelming force.

Local free levies raised from the coastal populations under French control had the tribal-loyalty problem in full: their allegiance was to their own leaders and communities, some of which were precisely what France was trying to subdue.

Faidherbe needed men who could survive the climate (which the local population could), who could fight, and who had **no loyalty to the peoples France was conquering.** He needed outsiders who were nonetheless African.

And the slave markets of West Africa were full of exactly such men.

Two — The Material at Hand

West African slavery supplied a population that fit the specification with grim precision: men who had been **captured in the interior wars and sold**, who were therefore already **severed from their kin and communities**, who came from peoples other than those on the coast, and who had — as slaves — no standing, no faction, and nothing to return to. They were, in the brutal logic of the position, ideal: outsiders to the coastal society, unbound from their origins by the slavery that had already been done to them, and available for purchase.

Faidherbe formally created the **tirailleurs sénégalais** by decree of Napoleon III in **July 1857**. He personally preferred and pushed for **free** volunteers, gave them proper uniforms and the status of regular troops, and believed in their effectiveness. But the sources are unambiguous that despite his reforms, **the purchase of slaves — *rachat* — remained the primary means of recruitment into the 1880s**, and that from 1857 to 1905 the regiments were composed substantially of slaves, ex-slaves, and men from the lowest social strata, sold to the French by African chiefs and masters.

Faidherbe, in 1857, reached independently for the solution Murad II reached for in the 1400s — a conquering infantry built from purchased outsiders severed from local ties — because he stood in the same position and the position generated the same answer. He did not need the Ottoman example. He had the problem, and he had the slave market, and the problem and the market between them wrote the solution.

PART VII

Rachat: The Purchase That Was Called a Liberation

The mechanism deserves precise description, because it is where the moral disguise was fitted over the structural substance, and the framework's method is to read the substance.

Rachat means "repurchase" or "ransom." Under the system, the French military **paid a sum — an enlistment bonus — directly to a slave's owner**, and the slave was thereby "freed." But the freedom arrived attached to an obligation: **the "freed" slave then owed the army twelve to fourteen years of service.**

Read the transaction as a structure, stripped of its vocabulary. A man who is owned by an African master becomes, by an act of purchase, bound to the French army for twelve to fourteen years. **Money changes hands to the previous owner. The man does not become free to go; he becomes a soldier who cannot leave.** The word attached to the transaction is "liberation." The substance of the transaction is a transfer of the man's bound labor from one holder to another, for a term nearly as long as the productive part of his life.

The study states the honest complications, because they are real and the framework does not need to flatten them.

The freedom was not wholly fictional. At the end of the term the tirailleur was, in law, free, and many were genuinely emancipated by service; by 1891 fugitive slaves in the "liberty villages" could obtain formal emancipation papers by enlisting. A slave bound to a master for life, with a master's total power over him, is in a materially worse position than a man bound to the army for fourteen years and then free. The distinction is not nothing, and Part IX takes it seriously.

But the freedom did not touch the structural logic. The army acquired a soldier who had been *bought*, who was *severed from his origins*, who had *no local loyalty to the peoples being conquered*, and who was *bound for a fixed term he had not freely chosen*. Every one of the specifications in Part II is satisfied. The paper freedom changed the man's status at the two endpoints — how he entered (by purchase presented as ransom) and how he left (free, if he survived) — while leaving the entire middle, the years of bound service that were the actual point, structurally identical to what a slave-soldier system produces.

This is the move this collection has documented again and again: a credible legal or moral constraint — here, the nineteenth-century abolitionist commitment that France officially held — does not stop the institution. **It changes its form.** France could not, in the age of abolition, simply maintain a slave army; the constraint was real and it bound. So the purchase was renamed a ransom, the bondage was given a term, and the thing was made sayable. The bill of exchange hid interest inside an exchange rate to satisfy the usury prohibition; *rachat* hid purchase inside "liberation" to satisfy the abolitionist prohibition. **The constraint was honored in the vocabulary and evaded in the substance** — and the interview evidence is blunt that France thereby "killed two birds with one stone": it could present itself as suppressing the slave trade while acquiring the soldiers of conquest from that very trade.

PART VIII

The Same Logic, the Freedom Notwithstanding

Now set the two systems side by side, feature against feature, and let the convergence show itself. The claim is not that the systems were identical in experience or in morality — they were not — but that the *structural logic of the position* produced the same institution in each.

The problem. Ottoman: a ruler who cannot trust the nobility or the tribes and needs a loyal standing army. French: a governor who cannot use European troops (they die) or trust local levies (they defect) and needs a conquering army. **Same position.**

The solution. Ottoman: build it from purchased or levied outsiders. French: build it from purchased outsiders. **Same solution.**

The material. Ottoman: Christian boys severed from Balkan villages by the *devshirme*. French: enslaved men severed from interior peoples by the wars and markets of West Africa, acquired through *rachat*. **Same material — the severed outsider — differing in that the Ottomans did the severing and the French bought men already severed.**

The severing from local loyalty. Ottoman: foreign origin, conversion, resettlement, ensuring no kin or faction near power. French: recruits drawn from peoples other than those being governed and conquered, with no local ties to the subject population. **Same principle — no loyalty to the coerced — achieved by different means.**

The binding. Ottoman: legal enslavement to the sultan. French: a bound term of twelve to fourteen years entered by purchase. **Same effect — service that does not depend on the soldier's continuing consent — differing in duration and in the legal name.**

The function. Both were the instrument of conquest and control: the Janissaries carried the Ottoman frontier into Europe; the tirailleurs conquered West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Madagascar for France, and then bled by the hundred thousand for France in the trenches of the First World War — some 200,000 served, more than 135,000 in Europe, some 30,000 killed. **Same function: the outsider's body spends itself for the empire's power.**

The parallel is not approximate. It is feature-by-feature, and it was produced with no meaningful transmission between the two cases — indeed, as Part V established, in full French knowledge of where the Ottoman version had led.

And now the one difference that genuinely matters, because the framework's honesty depends on naming it. The Janissaries were permitted to become **self-perpetuating** — to marry, to enroll their sons, to become a hereditary caste with its own interests — and that is what turned them from an instrument into a praetorian power that had to be destroyed. **France never let that happen to the tirailleurs.** The term of service ended; the corps did not become a hereditary military aristocracy; the tirailleur did not become a kingmaker who could depose a governor-general. The reversal of Part IV — the instrument turning on the master — did not occur in the French case.

Why not? Not because France was wiser, though it had the Ottoman example. The deeper reason is structural: **the tirailleurs were an instrument of a *colonial* power whose center of gravity was elsewhere.** The Janissaries were at the heart of the Ottoman state, in the capital, indispensable and concentrated — the conditions under which an instrument can capture its master. The tirailleurs were deployed at the periphery of an empire governed from Paris, their officers French, their command structure external, their concentration prevented. **The position that created the tirailleur denied it the one thing — proximity to the center of power — that had allowed the Janissary to reverse the flow.** The colonial structure that made the tirailleur's exploitation possible also, and for the same reason, made his praetorian revolt impossible. He was kept far from the throne he might otherwise, in time, have seized.

PART IX

What the Freedom Changed and What It Did Not

The study owes an honest accounting of the paper freedom, because to wave it away would be as much a distortion as to accept it at face value.

What the freedom changed. It was not nothing to be legally free at the end of a term rather than owned for life. The tirailleur tradition produced, over time, real people with real standing: the *originaires* of the four communes of Senegal — Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque — held French electoral rights and representation in Parliament, rights defended partly by the blood the tirailleurs shed. Veterans' organizations after the World Wars demanded and sometimes won equal rights. **Léopold Sédar Senghor**, who became the first president of independent Senegal in 1960, had served in the tirailleurs and been a German prisoner of war. A slave-soldier system in the strict Ottoman sense could not have produced a Senghor. The paper freedom, over a century, left cracks through which some genuine agency and citizenship grew, and those cracks were real.

What the freedom did not change. It did not change the position that created the corps, and therefore did not change the essential transaction: that the French Empire built its African conquests, and defended metropolitan France in two World Wars, substantially with the bodies of men it had acquired from a slave trade it claimed to be abolishing, bound for terms they had not freely chosen, deployed to conquer other Africans and to die in European quarrels that were not theirs. When Free French forces neared victory in 1944, de Gaulle ordered the *blanchiment* — the "whitening" — of the army, replacing tens of thousands of African soldiers at the front with white Frenchmen so that the liberation of France would wear a European face. **The tirailleurs were good enough to die for France in 1914 and 1940 and not good enough to be seen liberating it in 1944.** That is the position speaking with perfect clarity: the outsider's body is instrumental, and an instrument is used when needed and set aside when its visibility becomes inconvenient.

And in 1944, at **Thiaroye**, near Dakar, tirailleurs who had fought for France and been held as prisoners of war were, on their return, in a dispute over the back pay they were owed, fired upon and killed by the French army — the exact number still disputed and still contested by historians and the Senegalese state. **The men who had spent themselves for the empire were killed by it over the wages it had promised them.** No single fact in this study states the logic of the position more exactly: the instrument, having been used, was denied even its pay, and when it protested, it was fired on.

This is where the study insists, one final time, that legibility is not pardon. To understand that the tirailleur system followed from Faidherbe's position, and that Faidherbe's position followed from the structure of colonial conquest, is not to soften Thiaroye or the *blanchiment* or the century of bound service by a single degree. It is to see them correctly — as the outputs of a position that would have produced substantially the same outputs whoever occupied it, which is a far more disturbing thing to know than that a few cruel men did cruel things. **Cruel men can be removed. The position remains, waiting to be filled, generating the same institution from whoever fills it — in the 1400s, in the 1850s, and wherever, now, some state stands where the ruler of Part I stood and reaches for the outsider's sword.**

PART X

The Ledger

Both columns, in ink.

What the case establishes. Two empires — the Ottoman and the French — separated by five centuries, a continent, a religion, and every conscious intention, built the armies of their conquest out of **purchased outsiders severed from local ties and bound to the service of the state**. They did so without copying each other; the French, indeed, built their version in full knowledge of how the Ottoman version had ended, having fought a third slave-soldier caste, the Mamluks, in the field. The parallel is not a matter of influence or borrowing. It is **convergence** — the same position, occupied centuries apart, generating the same institution — and it is the clearest such convergence in this collection precisely because every channel of transmission can be excluded and the structural logic still produces the match, feature by feature. **The position wrote the institution. The culture, the century, and the cautionary literature were almost powerless against it.**

What the case adds to the framework. It shows that a credible moral constraint — here, the abolitionism that France officially professed — operates exactly as the cost-and-credibility studies in this collection predicted: it does not stop the institution, it **changes the institution's form**. France could not keep a slave army in the age of abolition, so it renamed purchase as ransom and enslavement as a fixed term, and built a purchased-outsider army that was sayable in the vocabulary of liberation. The freedom was real at the endpoints and hollow in the middle. And it shows the boundary condition on the institution's most dangerous tendency: the slave-soldier reverses and devours its master only when it sits close to the center of power, as the Janissary did; the colonial tirailleur, held at the periphery of an empire ruled from Paris, was denied the proximity that reversal requires — which is why France could exploit the logic for a century without ever facing the Auspicious Incident that logic eventually forces.

What the case refuses. It refuses the comfort of the plot, and it refuses the comfort of the monster. There was no meeting at which cruel men decided to build a slave army and disguise it; there was a governor with a colony to conquer, a climate that killed his European troops, a slave market that offered him exactly the men his position required, and an abolitionist commitment he had to be seen to honor — and the tirailleur system is what that position produced, as surely as the same position under Murad produced the Janissary. The men in the position could see part of what they were doing; Faidherbe genuinely preferred free volunteers, and genuinely believed he was also suppressing the slave trade. The field of the visible let him see the two birds he was killing with one stone and not the third thing he was building.

It was an architect's hour, and then another, and then another — 1362, 1453, 1826, 1798, 1857, 1882, 1914, 1944 — each a bounded episode in which identifiable people solved the problem in front of them with the materials at hand, and each handing the result to a structure that carried it forward on a logic none of them chose and none of them fully saw.

And the deepest finding is the one that should unsettle a reader most, because it is the reason legibility is not pardon. These two institutions were not built by two peculiarly wicked cultures. They were built by two ordinary states that found themselves in the same position — needing to conquer, unable to trust the men close at hand — and reached, each on its own, for the same human beings: the severed, the purchased, the outsider with nowhere to return to and no one to be loyal to but the power that had taken everything else away. The Janissary and the tirailleur are five hundred years and five thousand miles apart, and they are the same institution, because **the position is the same, and the position is what builds.**

The sultan gave the boy a new name and a new god and made him the empire's sword. The Republic gave the slave a fixed term and a tricolor and called it freedom, and made him the empire's sword. **Neither the sultan nor the Republic invented the outsider's sword. They found it, where it has always lain, in the logic of the position — and picked it up.**

Held, like everything in this project, as tested, not revealed.

A Note on Sources

Every quotation is verified to a published source; none is invented.

On military slavery as a recurring institution. The characterization of the "Mamluk/Ghulam Phenomenon" as enduring nearly a thousand years, from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries, is David Ayalon's, as reproduced in the standard reference literature on the Mamluks; see Ayalon's collected studies on the Mamluk military institution. On slave dynasties, the Delhi Sultanate (from 1206) and the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt (1250–1517) follow the standard accounts.

On the Janissaries and the devshirme. The origins under Murad I (r. c. 1362–1389); the beginning with prisoners of war retained for the *kapıkulu* ("slaves of the Porte") and formed into the first battalions of the *yeni çeri*; the systematization of the *devshirme* under Murad II and Mehmed II; the levy of Christian boys principally from the rural Balkans; conversion to Islam; the prohibition on enslaving the sultan's own Muslim subjects as the legal reason the levy fell on Christians; the rise of *devshirme* products to provincial governorships and the grand vizierate (the second most powerful office in the empire); and the design purpose of creating a force "free from tribal or aristocratic ties" that "removed ties to local elites and made the boys dependent on the sultan" — follow the standard reference literature, including the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the EBSCO and encyclopedia treatments of the devshirme, and the summary accounts cited. The observation that feudal lords and tribal chiefs "supplied soldiers, but their loyalty stayed with local leaders rather than the Ottomans" is quoted from the WorldAtlas account "Who Were the Janissaries?" The bans on marriage, property, and trade, and their later erosion, follow the same literature. The earliest documentary references to the devshirme (the sermon of Isidore Glabas, 1395; references of 1430 and 1438) and the scholarly uncertainty about the exact date of origin are noted in the EBSCO and academic sources; the study flags the dating as contested.

On the reversal and the Auspicious Incident. The seventeenth-century acquisition of the rights to marry, to enroll sons, and to admit free-born Muslims, and the consequent decline of the devshirme; the Janissaries' evolution into a hereditary, privileged, tax-exempt corps that deposed sultans and blocked military reform; and the *Vaka-i Hayriye* ("Auspicious Incident") of 15 June 1826, in which Mahmud II provoked, bombarded, and destroyed the corps, killing thousands and abolishing the institution after nearly four centuries — follow the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on the Auspicious Incident and the standard accounts. **The alternative historiography** — that the Janissaries' destruction owed to their economic and social embeddedness as representatives of the autonomous urban classes (artisans and guilds) who stood to lose from state modernization, rather than simply to military decadence — is noted as a serious contending interpretation; see the discussion and the scholarship it cites (e.g. the work of Cemal Kafadar and others on the Janissaries' urban economic role). This study does not adjudicate between the two readings and its argument does not depend on doing so.

On the Mamluks and French knowledge of them. The Mamluks as purchased slave-soldiers (mostly Qipchak Turks, later Circassians) who overthrew the Ayyubids in 1250 and ruled Egypt and Syria until 1517; the meaning of *mamluk* ("owned"); the principle (imperfectly observed) that Mamluk status could not be inherited, requiring replenishment from outside; and their defeat of the Mongols at Ain Jalut — follow *History Today* ("Who Were the Mamluks?"), the reference literature, and the standard scholarship. **Napoleon's campaign in Egypt (1798) and the French collision with the Mamluks at the Battle of the Pyramids**, together with Napoleon's subsequent raising of a Mamluk squadron, are matters of standard historical record and establish the direct French acquaintance with a slave-soldier institution; the final destruction of Mamluk power came with Muhammad Ali's massacre of 1811.

On the tirailleurs sénégalais. The formation of the first permanent battalion by Louis Faidherbe (governor of Senegal from 1854) by decree of Napoleon III in July 1857; Faidherbe's motivation in lacking sufficient and climate-viable French troops; his preference for free volunteers even as *rachat* continued; and the composition of the corps from 1857 to 1905 substantially from slaves, ex-slaves, and men of the lowest social strata sold by African chiefs and masters — follow **Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960***

(Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), the foundational scholarly work, together with the 1914-1918-Online encyclopedia article "Tirailleurs Sénégalais," the BlackPast.org and Wikipedia accounts, and Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge, 1998). **The rachat mechanism** — that "French military authorities paid an enlistment bonus directly to a slave's master, and the 'freed' slave then owed twelve to fourteen years of service to the army" — is quoted from the 1914-1918-Online encyclopedia article, following Echenberg. The official ending of *rachat* in 1882 and the continuation of coercive quasi-purchasing thereafter, the incorporation of prisoners of war and porters, and the 1891 provision for fugitive slaves in "liberty villages" to obtain emancipation papers by enlistment, follow the same sources. The interview characterization that France "killed two birds with one stone" — suppressing the clandestine slave trade while acquiring soldiers for colonial expansion — is from the ROAPE interview with Mamadou Koné (2026), and represents that interviewee's framing.

On the tirailleurs in the World Wars and after. The First World War figures (approximately 200,000 served, more than 135,000 in Europe, some 30,000 killed) follow the Wikipedia and encyclopedia accounts, which derive from Echenberg, Marc Michel (*L'Appel à l'Afrique*, 1982), and related scholarship; figures vary between sources and the study reports the commonly cited range. The *originaires* of the four communes (Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque) and their electoral rights follow the 1914-1918-Online article and Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France* (2008). The *blanchiment* ("whitening") of the Free French forces in 1944, with the replacement of tens of thousands of African soldiers by white Frenchmen, and Léopold Sédar Senghor's service in the tirailleurs, POW status, and later presidency of Senegal (1960), follow the BlackPast.org account and the standard histories. **The Thiaroye massacre of 1 December 1944** — the killing of returning West African veterans in a dispute over pay and conditions — is a matter of historical record whose casualty figures remain disputed and are the subject of ongoing scholarly and diplomatic contestation; the study reports it as contested and does not assign a figure. See the scholarship of Armelle Mabon and the recent reassessments by the French and Senegalese states.

On the framework parallels. For two-layer formation (the childhood installation of loyalty and identity beneath later vigilance), the total institution, and the cost-and-credibility mechanism (a credible constraint changing the form rather than the fact of the pursuit), see the relevant studies in this collection and the sources cited there.

Contested matters are flagged as such throughout: the exact date and early evolution of the devshirme; the competing interpretations of the Janissaries' destruction; the casualty figures for the World Wars and for Thiaroye; and the degree of coercion in tirailleur recruitment after the official end of *rachat* in 1882, on which the scholarship varies. Where this study errs, it should err visibly, in a form the cited scholarship can correct.

Part of the collection *Patterns of Power*. **Tested, not revealed.**